

FEATURE

Biofeedback Certification Institute of America: The University Initiative

Fred Shaffer, PhD

Truman State University, Kirksville, MO

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Biofeedback is an important curricular component in diverse undergraduate and graduate programs. Disciplines such as communications disorders, exercise therapy, and the performing arts, which have incorporated biofeedback in their coursework and professional practice for decades, have been largely “invisible” to the mainstream biofeedback movement. The University Initiative is a continuing Biofeedback Certification Institute of America (BCIA) effort to identify, contact, recognize, and support university biofeedback and neurofeedback programs that are based on BCIA certification requirements. Programs at the California School of Professional Psychology at Alliant International University, the Saybrook Graduate School, Truman State University, the University of North Texas, and Widener University are profiled.

The Biofeedback Certification Institute of America’s (BCIA’s) University Initiative celebrates the interdisciplinary scope of biofeedback in undergraduate and graduate institutions. Biofeedback coursework is not confined to psychology and allied health programs. Biofeedback is now an integral part of the curriculum in programs as diverse as communication disorders, exercise therapy, naturopathy, the performing arts, and physical therapy.

BCIA launched the University Initiative more than a year ago to recognize and support university biofeedback programs that are based on the BCIA certification requirements. The first visible product of the University Initiative was the BCIA University Seminar held at the 2005 Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback (AAPB) annual meeting in Austin, Texas. Enthusiastic educators met with Judy Crawford, BCIA director of certification, and Dr. Celeste De Bease, BCIA board member and cofounder of the University Initiative, to network and discuss how to prepare their graduates for BCIA certification and professional careers. The success of this meeting led to continued collaboration throughout this past year and a decision to turn the University Seminar into an annual event.

The University Initiative’s goals for the next year are ambitious. We plan to identify accredited universities that teach biofeedback and neurofeedback, provide contact information and links for these programs on the BCIA Web site, help educators network with each other and expand their teaching resources, and help publicize their excellent work. This initiative recognizes that support for university biofeedback programs is a vital component of BCIA’s overall mission.

We would like to start to introduce you to the impressive biofeedback programs now available in accredited universities. Because of the large number of these programs, we will profile them in successive articles. In this issue, we will report on programs at the California School of Professional Psychology at Alliant International University, East Carolina University, the Saybrook Graduate School, Truman State University, the University of North Texas, and Widener University.

Program: California School of Professional Psychology at Alliant International University

Contact: Richard Gevirtz, PhD, Distinguished Professor of Psychology, CSPP@Alliant International University; e-mail: rgevirtz@alliant.edu; phone: 858-635-4842.

California School of Professional Psychology at Alliant International University offers a health psychology track within the clinical psychology PhD program (American Psychological Association approved). The program is designed to train clinical psychologists who would envision themselves working in a medical setting. Three general areas of competency are included: applied psychophysiology and biofeedback, changing health behaviors, and chronic disease management. The applied psychophysiology component consists of didactic and lab work that follows the BCIA blueprint, supervised clinical experience in one of their designated settings (including a biofeedback outpatient clinic, Children’s Hospital, Sharp and Pain Rehabilitation program), and research



Figure 1. Saybrook students study alternative therapies.

relating to health psychology themes. Most of the health track students become BCIA certified in their 2nd or 3rd year and are able to work at clinical sites in town while completing the program.

Program: Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center

Contact: Donald Moss, PhD, Integrative Health Studies; e-mail: dross@saybrook.net; phone: 616-842-1277; Web site: www.saybrook.edu/academics/concentrations.asp.

The Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center is an autonomous graduate school in San Francisco, conferring master's and doctoral degrees in several areas of psychology. The Saybrook mission is to bridge humanistic learning with scientific research. Saybrook faculty includes such recognized figures in alternative medicine as Jeanne Achterberg, Stanley Krippner, Lyn Freeman, and Donald Moss.

Saybrook students ordinarily are required to attend residential college sessions two to four times a year as part of their degree work. In December, the Integrative Health Studies (IHS) announced to its students that they could substitute attendance at AAPB or the International Society for Neuronal Regulation for attendance at their usual residential college. Participation in a professional association meeting such as AAPB's exposes graduate students to a wide range of research and clinical knowledge, adding breadth to their academic coursework. The IHS at Saybrook offers coursework in psychophysiology, health psychology, and complementary and alternative approaches to healing as well as residential intensive courses on biofeedback, biological monitoring, and the use of relaxation techniques, hypnosis, and imagery therapies (Figure 1). IHS students are encouraged to obtain



Figure 2. At the Truman State University Speech and Hearing Clinic, biofeedback for voice includes games for practicing pitch control (VisiPitch IV, KayPentax).

training and gain certification in core mind-body therapies, such as biofeedback, neurofeedback, and clinical hypnosis, as part of their doctoral program.

Program: Truman State University Communications Disorders

Contact: Paula S. Cochran, PhD, CCC-SLP, Professor, Communication Disorders; e-mail: paula@truman.edu; phone: 660-785-4677; Web site: www2.truman.edu/comdis.

In the Truman State University communication disorders program, student clinicians and faculty have been exploring the use of biofeedback with their clients for about 20 years (Figure 2). Biofeedback applications for speech and voice problems are possibly the most rigorously documented among the many clinical uses of new technologies. At present, several computer-based instruments and software are commercially available that visually display key parameters of speech and voice, in real time. For example, a particular client might use the computer to assist with practicing control of pitch, loudness, or nasality. Both children and adult clients benefit from real-time visual information about their speech and voice behaviors, in addition to verbal feedback provided by a speech-language pathologist.

Students at Truman are introduced to biofeedback in an undergraduate course in speech and hearing science while studying the acoustic properties of speech and voice. In CMDS 578 Clinical Applications of Computers, which may be the longest running course of its kind, Truman offers advanced students extensive experience with a wide variety of clinical applications of technology, including the clinical use of biofeedback.

Institution: University of North Texas

Contacts: Cynthia Chandler, PhD, Director UNT Biofeedback Lab; e-mail: chandler@coe.unt.edu; phone: 940-565-2910; Web site: www.coe.unt.edu/CDHE.

Eugenia Bodenhamer-Davis, PhD, Associate Professor and Director, Neurotherapy Lab, Department of Rehabilitation, Social Work and Addictions, University of North Texas; e-mail: genie@unt.edu; phone: 940-565-3467.

The Neurotherapy Lab at the University of North Texas (UNT) is located in the Department of Rehabilitation, Social Work and Addictions. Students from various behavioral science programs on campus as well as from other universities get practicum and internship experiences in neurofeedback and the quantitative electroencephalogram (QEEG) in the Neurotherapy Lab. Course offerings, in addition to Introduction to Neurofeedback, now include an Introduction to QEEG that is available for 3 graduate credit hours or for continuing professional education.

The UNT Counseling Program offers a master's focus and a doctoral specialty in biofeedback therapy. The program includes a state-of-the-art biofeedback clinic with multiple rooms of combined EEG/peripheral biofeedback clinical computer systems. The following graduate courses are offered for training for national certification in biofeedback/neurofeedback through the UNT Counseling Program: Introduction to Biofeedback in Counseling, Biofeedback Practicum, and Advanced Practicum in Biofeedback.

Institution: Widener University

Contact: Celeste De Bease, PhD, Medical Psychologist; e-mail: DrDeBease@aol.com; Web site: www.widener.edu/biofeedback.

Widener University's Biofeedback Clinic and Certification Center takes graduate students through the entire BCIA certification program within a year. Students sit for their BCIA exam at the end of the course. The vision of the Institute for Graduate Clinical Psychology at Widener was to provide its graduates with the added advantage of this prestigious certification (Figure 3). The Center's director is Dr. Celeste De Bease,



Figure 3. Psychology intern Jennifer Minkin and practicum student Willie Simmons work at Widener's Biofeedback Clinic & Certification Center.

who is a fellow of BCIA. Widener also has an online course in general biofeedback.

The diverse biofeedback programs we have discovered in our universities challenge the perception that biofeedback training is declining. Instead, we find that graduate and undergraduate biofeedback courses in accredited universities are thriving. The achievements of these university programs are inspiring and provide evidence that the biofeedback movement has a promising future.

Conclusion

In the next article in the University Initiative series, we will profile several remarkable biofeedback programs, including San Francisco State University, Sonoma State University, East Carolina University, and the University of Maryland's School of Nursing.



Fred Shaffer

Correspondence: Fred Shaffer, PhD, Department of Psychology, McClain 229, Truman State University, 100 E Normal, Kirksville, MO, e-mail: fshaffer@truman.edu.